

## State History of Foster Care Review

### The Foster Care Citizen Review Board in Utah

In 1989 child advocates in Utah began to hear about the success of the citizen review process in other states. By 1992 legislators, child welfare workers, administrators and child advocates were all aware that changes needed to be made in the way children and families were served in Utah. One of the changes identified early on was a need for outside input and review - Asunshine@ - in the establishment of policy, the development of procedures and the review of cases progress.

The 1993 Utah State Legislature passed a bill to establish a two year pilot of the Utah Foster Care Citizen Review Board. Four Boards were established in November 1993. The Boards were located in Ogden, Salt Lake City (2) and Price. From November 1993 to October 1995 these Boards were staffed by 35 citizen volunteers who gave of 4,000 hours of their time to the children of Utah. These four Boards reviewed a total of 354 cases involving 511 children. The dollar value of this volunteer service to the state was approximately \$60,000.

In 1995, the legislature re-authorized the pilot project until March 31, 1997, provided additional funds and required it to increase the number of Boards. Four additional Boards, located in Layton, Provo and Salt Lake City (2), were established in November 1995. The program was operating with eighty trained and committed volunteers. During the eight month period between November 95 and June 96 citizen Review Board volunteers donated almost 3300 hours reviewing 379 children in 259 cases. The dollar value of this volunteer service to the state was approximately \$49,500.

In spite of the fact that no additional funds were available from the Legislature for expansion of the Citizen Review Board until 1997, the FCCRB contacted the Western and Central Regions of the Division of Child and Family Services and offered to provide additional review services on a contract basis. A Letter of Agreement was prepared and signed between the Central and Western Regions of DCFS and the Foster Care Citizen Review Board. Two new Board were established in the Salt Lake City area, one additional Board was placed in Provo and two Boards were created in the Cedar City and St. George areas. An additional 40 volunteers were recruited and trained. This contract continued until March 1997.

A bill was introduced during the 1997 legislative session with the intent (1) to make the Foster Care Citizen Review Board an independent, permanent, state agency; and, (2) to extend the mandate of Citizen Review state-wide. The first goal was realized and the Foster Care Citizen Review Board became an independent, permanent, state agency on April 1, 1997. However, due to budget constraints citizen review was not mandated state-wide. The bill which passed required the FCCRB to conduct all of the necessary reviews in the First, Second, Third and Fourth Judicial Districts. It also required establishment of at least one Board in both the Fifth and Seventh Judicial Districts. By the end of the 1997 fiscal year on June 30, 1997 the Citizen Review Board had accomplished a portion of its new responsibilities by recruiting and training an additional 80 volunteers to staff the eight (8) new Boards created in the Salt Lake City area to fulfill the requirement to conduct all of the reviews in the Third Judicial District. These new Boards met for the first time in June of 1997.

During the 1998 legislative session House bill 4 was introduced by Representative Nora Stephens which sought to extend the services of the Foster Care Citizen Review Board statewide. This bill passed both the House and the Senate unanimously. The bill indicates that within appropriations from the legislature the FCCRB shall establish boards in each judicial district throughout the state. In August 1998 a Board Coordinator began to facilitate reviews in the Eastern Region of DCFS - Roosevelt, Vernal, Price, Moab, Monticello and Blanding. Also in July 1998 contacts were made with the Ute Tribe and the Navajo Nation to coordinate the review of Native American children in state's custody. The Southwest Region of DCFS also became fully served by the FCCRB in 1998. In the Spring of 1999, Citizen Review Boards were operational in all areas of the State.